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SUBJECT: BELGIUM'S DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMS RUNNING HARD TO BE
ELECTED TO HEAD THE WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION

¶1. SUMMARY: Belgium's Director General of Customs, Noel Colpin, is running hard to be elected as the new Secretary General of the World Custom Organization. He has the full support of his government. He has worked very closely with the Embassy for many years and was Belgium's chief negotiator on a number of major U.S. initiatives with Belgium, including the Department of Energy Megaports program and the Container Security Initiative, run by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol. END SUMMARY.

¶2. Belgium's Director of Customs, Noel Colpin, called on the Ambassador on April 23 to promote his candidacy to become the next head of the World Customs Organization. His platform includes improving the links between import and export regimes and establishing a "SWIFT" for customs agencies. (NOTE: SWIFT is a Belgian company which provides the backbone of the world's financial markets, by serving as an exchange for data for financial transactions. END NOTE). His aim is to move beyond the web of bilateral arrangements between customs agencies to set up an integrated global system relying on standardization and "e-customs" and to provide a single platform for customs information exchanges, both for trade facilitation but also for enhanced security.

¶3. Colpin is aware that there are five other European candidates and three others from non-EU countries. Nevertheless, he asserted that he is the only Customs Director General running for the position.

¶4. COMMENT: The Embassy has worked with Colpin for many years. He was the GOB negotiator on Belgium's model Megaports program (with the Department of Energy) and on the successful Customs and Border Patrol Container Security Initiative program in Antwerp. He is very pro-U.S. and has had very good cooperative working relations with the Embassy. He has been particularly useful in helping to resolve difficult dual-use cases. He also helped the Embassy on numerous occasions by unblocking goods of U.S. companies being held up in the ports of Antwerp and Zeebrugge. He has a reputation as being able to broker compromises in difficult situations, not an uncommon trait for Belgians in general.

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